



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – March 8, 2013
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Daniel C. Esty
Presented By Deputy Commissioner Macky McCleary

Raised Senate Bill No. 1010 –AN ACT CONCERNING SEA LEVEL RISE AND THE FUNDING OF PROJECTS BY THE CLEAN WATER FUND

Raised Senate Bill No. 1012 –AN ACT CONCERNING A BEST PRACTICES GUIDE FOR COASTAL STRUCTURES AND PERMITTING

Raised Senate Bill No. 1013 –AN ACT CONCERNING CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND DATA COLLECTION

Raised Senate Bill No. 1014 –AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEFINITION OF "RISE IN SEA LEVEL"

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised Senate Bill Nos. 1010, 1012, 1013, and 1014 concerning various aspects of climate change and adaptation to sea level rise. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) offers the following testimony.

DEEP strongly supports these bills, which arose from the recommendations of the legislature's Climate Change and Shoreline Protection Task Force, chaired by Rep. James Albis. All of these bills would take immediate, practical steps toward long-term measures to help Connecticut adapt to the new normal of sea level rise and more frequent and intense coastal storms. DEEP is looking forward to working with the Task Force, environmental groups, the academic community, and other interested stakeholders to better prepare our state for the climate challenges that we know are coming.

Taking each bill in turn, **SB 1010** would add as a priority in Clean Water Fund projects the ability of the proposed project to mitigate sea level rise impacts. This issue was brought into sharp relief during storms Irene and Sandy, when some coastal sewage treatment plants lost power, resulting in sewage being discharged, or risked being inundated by storm surge. Water quality facilities are critical infrastructure, and many are necessarily located at low elevations along the coast and along inland rivers. Thus, it will be a high priority for the Clean Water Fund grant process to consider enhanced coastal and inland hazard resilience among the criteria for selecting projects. Therefore, we suggest that the language in the bill be expanded to include consideration of more intense and frequent storms, both at the coast and inland. With that addition, this bill would grant DEEP the explicit authority to take such issues into consideration statewide.

SB 1012 would require DEEP to acquire information necessary to develop a Best Practices guide for regulating coastal structures. While we have already consulted with other states and agencies and collected much information (see, e.g., the Lessons Learned document at http://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/long_island_sound/shorelinepreservation/lessonslearnedandbestpractices_sandy.pdf), we have not been entirely successful in persuading applicants and consultants to vary from traditional practices in terms of shoreline protective structures. It is generally recognized within the national coastal management community that the preferred adaptation strategy should rely to the maximum extent on natural coastal processes and dynamics, but shoreline armoring is all too often the reflexive, default response. Therefore, we appreciate any initiative that will assist in promoting more innovative and sustainable nonstructural measures such as living shorelines, and we will be pleased to help disseminate this information.

We are particularly supportive of **SB 1013**, since this bill offers the greatest long-term potential to help Connecticut adapt effectively to a changing coast and climate. This proposal would authorize the creation of a Connecticut Center for Coasts (Center) as a joint project of DEEP and the University of Connecticut, to conduct research, undertake analysis and provide technical education and assistance on shoreline adaptation. The Center would serve as a much-needed focal point for Connecticut-specific studies and research on sea level rise, shore protection, structure design and other coastal issues, and could provide authoritative science-based guidance on local adaptation issues. However, as our experience with storms Irene and Sandy illustrated, climate change can cause increased flooding and other impacts far away from the coast, and we believe that the University's expertise could be even more effectively employed by broadening the scope of the Center's work to include adaptation issues throughout Connecticut. With this caveat, and recognizing that no source of funding is identified in the bill, we remain very supportive of the concept of a University of Connecticut Center for the Coasts and look forward to working with the Task Force, the University, and the legislature to help make it a reality and to expand its focus statewide.

Finally, **SB 1014** would amend the recently-enacted definition of "rise in sea level," which looks only at historic rates of sea level rise, to include the option of a projected rise of two to five inches per decade for the purposes of municipal planning. We certainly support the intent of this bill, since any effective planning for the future must consider what is scientifically projected to occur, rather than simply extrapolating from past experience. However, DEEP has some concerns with the language, in part because it appears to be redundant in that the existing definition is already applied by statute only in the context of state and municipal planning. In addition, there may be other ways to select a projected sea level rise number, including projections that may be developed pursuant to section 1 (3)(C) of Senate Bill No. 1013. In any event, we are happy to continue working with the Task Force and other proponents of the bill to create adequate authority for state and local planning that takes into account the full range of potential sea level rise and the future risks associated with it.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation to the Environment Committee and to Representative Albis and the Task Force for squarely addressing the issues of climate change adaptation and sea level rise, and by raising these bills, marking the start of a very important and continuing conversation.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on these four proposals. If you should require any additional information, please contact DEEP's legislative liaison, Robert LaFrance at 860-424-3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov.